

Jackie Kennedy's ArtCraft Cachet

By Harry F. Themal

Jackie Kennedy, Leo August, the Washington Press and ArtCraft combined to produce a special commemorative cover for the John F. Kennedy memorial stamp (Scott 1246) issued May 27, 1964.

Three thousand gray-blue covers with a reproduction of Mrs. Kennedy's signature and placed in a folded card (Figure 1) were meant for "her friends and family," according to a letter to August from Pamela Turnure, the widow's secretary.

The correspondence between Jacqueline Kennedy, her staff and August was sold in a September 1996 auction by Jacques C. Schiff Jr.

The exchange of letters shows Mrs. Kennedy's personal interest in getting exactly what she wanted. Some of the office correspondence is on mourning stationery with a black border.

When word came that a commemorative cover would be issued for the late President Kennedy, August wrote the former first lady for a suggested photo of her husband for his ArtCraft cachet.

His request got buried amid the massive correspondence Mrs. Kennedy had received. About a month later he received an apologetic call from Mrs. Kennedy's office but Washington Press had already

chosen the portrait for its cachet. Instead the idea was launched for Mrs. Kennedy to have her own FDC of the JFK commemorative issue. August assured her that there would be no charge for preparing the covers.

Turnure said Mrs. Kennedy preferred to use the picture of her husband that appeared on the JFK mass card (Figure 2), a copy of which was sent to Washington Press along with a glossy copy of the portrait.

"You will note that the background is completely washed out, which is the way Mrs. Kennedy preferred

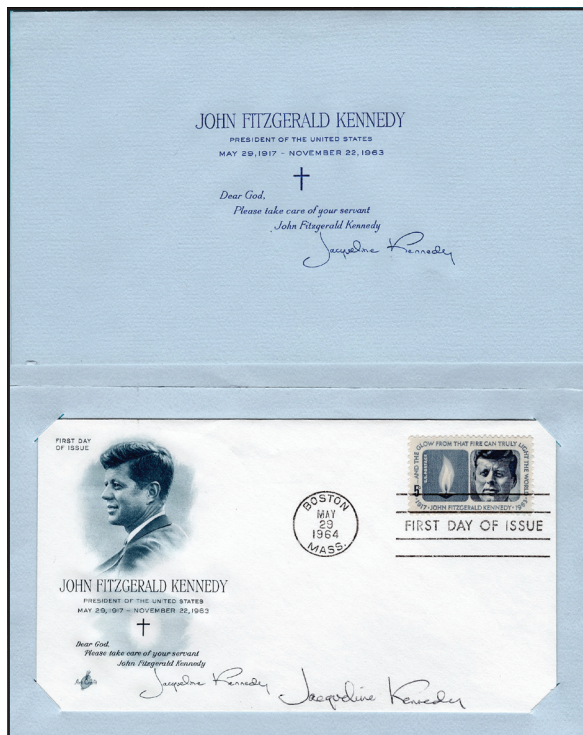


Figure 1: A folded card and envelope provided to Mrs. Kennedy and autographed next to her facsimile signature.

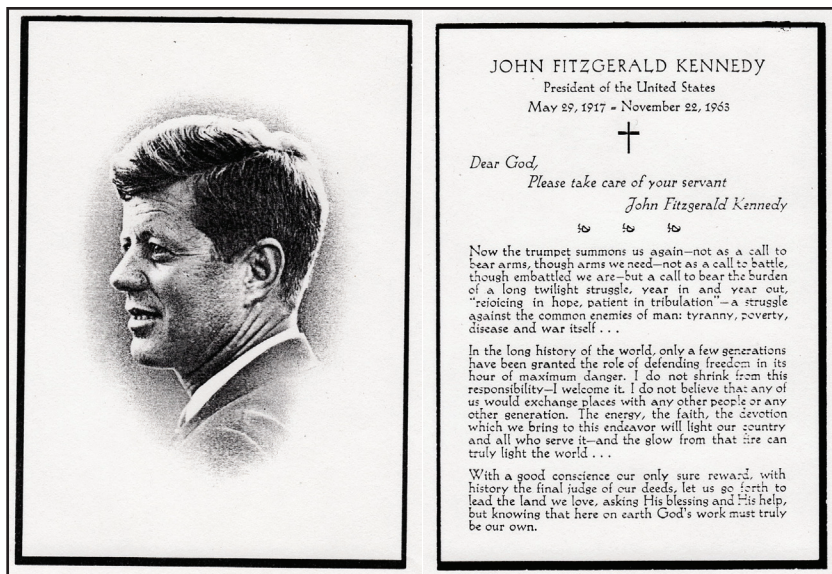


Figure 2: The JFK mass card.

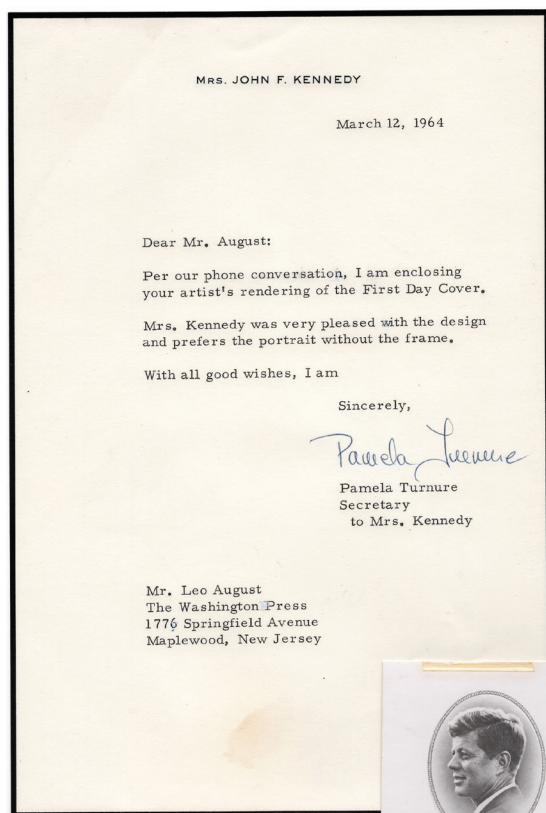


Figure 3: Letter from Pamela Turnure, Mrs. Kennedy's secretary, indicating that she preferred the portrait "without the frame" instead of the submitted one, which was returned with the letter and is shown enlarged above.

the picture,” Ms. Turnure writes. An engraver at Woodbury and Co. in Worcester, Mass., asked for and received “a flatter print” of the photo from which he engraved that pose into a frame for the cover.

Wrote an official of the company, “All of us here are unusually aware of the importance that this job be a masterpiece.”

The new engraving was sent for approval and received this comment (Figure 3), “Mrs. Kennedy was very pleased with the design and prefers the portrait without the frame.”

Color proofs of the cachet in blue, black and gray-blue were then sent to Mrs. Kennedy to make her choice, along with the blue sleeve and envelope in which the FDC was finally placed.

She said she preferred a color matching the blue of the stamp for the cover, and Washington Press got a color match from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

“Everyone is very pleased with the way the color turned out,” writes Turnure.

Her letter says that Mrs. Kennedy “would be very grateful if you could send her three thousand of these covers for her friends and family.” The typed letter says “hundred,” which was crossed out in ink and “thousand” written above.

The FDC was placed on one side of a folder with the other side reading, in blue ink on the blue background, the same words as the cachet itself, taken from the mass card, “JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY/PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES/MAY 29,

1917-NOVEMBER 22, 1963.” Below a cross, it read, “Dear God, Please take care of your servant, John Fitzgerald Kennedy,” and her signature. The ArtCraft logo and “FIRST DAY OF ISSUE” also appeared on the front.

The exchange of correspondence did not include any discussion that this should be on the cover and the folder.

A few days after the stamp’s first day, May 29, 1964, Mrs. Kennedy wrote August on mourning family crest stationery her “deepest appreciation...for your kindness in sending me the engraved first day covers. You were extremely thoughtful to send so many, and I know that these beautiful covers will have special meaning for each person who receives them” (Figure 4).

All of the correspondence to August was mailed in envelopes with her facsimile signature, a franking privilege granted her for life by Congress the day of the president’s assassination.

The correspondence discloses that Leo and Sam August also sent “very attractive leather stamp albums especially made for Caroline and John.”

Wrote Mrs. Kennedy’s secretary, “I know that the children will be interested in the various stamps from all over the world when they are older.”

John Kennedy Jr. died in a plane crash July 16, 1999. Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg recently assumed a post as the U. S. ambassador to Japan. Jackie Kennedy died May 19, 1994.

Leo August had more copies

made of the cover from the original plate and sent them to an unknown number of his contacts with a printed explanation of how he and Mrs. Kennedy planned the special item.

The Washington Press files include acknowledgements from such recipients as Sen. Harrison Williams, the Cardinal Spellman Philatelic Museum, and such philatelic people as Dick Thompson, then president of the American First Day Cover Society.

Some newspaper stamp columns wrote about and reproduced a photo of the cover.

The next year when an 11-cent airletter sheet (Scott UC38) was announced carrying JFK's picture, Leo August asked if Mrs. Kennedy had any suggestions for a portrait for a cachet Artcraft could use.

Ms. Turnure wrote August, "Unfortunately, she does not feel she can contribute any ideas to its design. Our supply of unusual pictures has been exhausted and Mrs. Kennedy feels she must leave the selection of an appropriate picture to your good judgment."

Leo August, a founder of the AFDCS, died on Dec. 4, 1997. He was 83. His brother Sam had died eight years earlier.

The auctioned files included autographed ArtCraft FDCs for Scott 1246, including ones by Robert Kennedy (Figure 5), JFK's brother, and by JFK successor Lyndon Johnson (Figure 6).

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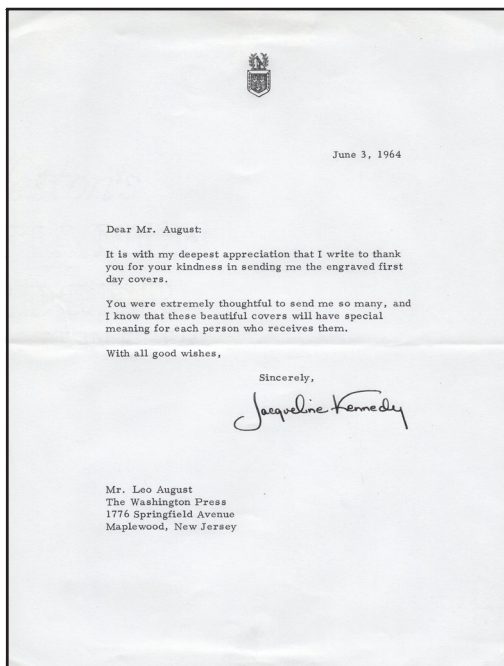


Figure 4: Mrs. Kennedy's thank you letter to Leo August.

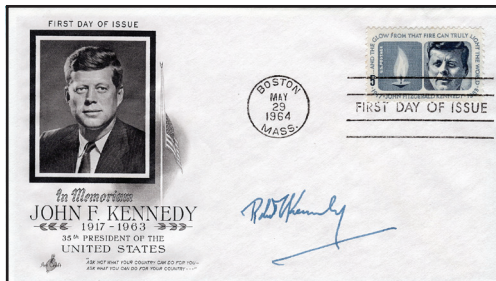


Figure 5: Kennedy stamp FDC signed by Robert Kennedy, JFK's brother.

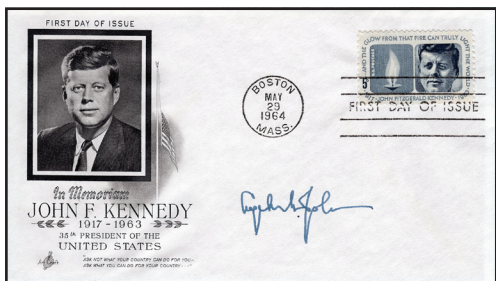


Figure 6: Kennedy stamp FDC signed by President Lyndon Johnson.